

## **Ephesians 6:10-18 - J.B. Phillips New Testament**

### **Be forewarned and forearmed in your spiritual conflict**

<sup>10-18</sup> In conclusion be strong—not in yourselves but in the Lord, in the power of his boundless resource. Put on God’s complete armour so that you can successfully resist all the devil’s methods of attack. For our fight is not against any physical enemy: it is against organisations and powers that are spiritual. We are up against the unseen power that controls this dark world, and spiritual agents from the very headquarters of evil. Therefore, you must wear the whole armour of God that you may be able to resist evil in its day of power, and that even when you have fought to a standstill you may still stand your ground. Take your stand then with truth as your belt, righteousness your breastplate, the Gospel of peace firmly on your feet, salvation as your helmet and in your hand the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God. Above all be sure you take faith as your shield, for it can quench every burning missile the enemy hurls at you. Pray at all times with every kind of spiritual prayer, keeping alert and persistent as you pray for all Christ’s men and women.

## **Ephesians 6:10-18 - New International Version**

### **The Armour of God**

10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. 11 Put on the full armour of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. 12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. 13 Therefore put on the full armour of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. 14 Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, 15 and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. 16 In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. 17 Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

18 And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people.

**Read the JB Philips translation of Ephesians 6:10-18.**

**Questions to answer:**

1. What does Paul mean by “organisations and powers that are spiritual....the unseen power that controls this dark world, and spiritual agents from the very headquarters of evil.” Maybe look it up in the NIV translation and compare it with JB Philips.
2. What are some examples of these organisations and powers which we face today?
3. What does Paul mean by “the flaming arrows of the evil one”? Can you think of some flaming arrows you need to defend yourself against?
4. What is faith?
5. What does it mean to take faith as your shield”?

Re-read the passage and capture your thoughts and reflections on the questions.

The following pages contain some suggested “answers” and key points to consider.

## “Answers”

**Question 1.** Paul’s phrase comes from Ephesians 6:12, and it reflects a first-century Jewish-Christian worldview about evil, power, and spiritual conflict. He is not talking about human enemies, but about non-human forces that influence the world.

Here’s what Paul likely means, layer by layer.

### a) “Not against flesh and blood”

Paul first rules out human opponents. Christians are not ultimately fighting governments, cultures, or people—even hostile ones. The real conflict is behind human systems.

### b) The four phrases (what they refer to)

Paul stacks several related terms. This was common in ancient writing to describe a single reality from multiple angles, not four completely separate groups.

#### i “Rulers” (archai)

These are foundational or governing powers. In Jewish thought, nations were believed to have spiritual beings associated with them (see Daniel 10). Paul uses this term elsewhere for cosmic powers that stand behind earthly rule.

Think: unseen forces that shape systems, ideologies, and structures.

#### ii “Authorities” (exousiai)

This word means delegated power or jurisdiction. These are forces that exercise influence, not just exist abstractly.

Think: powers that authorize or legitimize injustice, deception, or oppression.

#### iii “Powers of this dark world” (kosmokratores)

This is a strong term meaning “world-rulers”. It suggests powers that dominate the present age characterized by darkness (ignorance of God, sin, death).

Think: spiritual forces that shape the moral and spiritual climate of society.

#### iv “Spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms”

“Heavenly realms” does not mean heaven where God dwells in purity. In Paul’s thought, it refers to the invisible spiritual dimension that overlaps with earthly life.

These are evil spiritual beings, not metaphors, operating in that unseen realm.

## What Paul is not saying

He is not promoting fear or obsession with demons, He is not giving a detailed demonology, He is not excusing human evil (“the devil made me do it”). Humans are still responsible—but they are influenced.

Why Paul says this

Paul’s main point is practical:

You cannot fight spiritual problems with merely human weapons. That’s why he immediately talks about: truth, righteousness, the gospel of peace, faith, salvation, the Word of God.

These are counter-forces to the powers he just named.

Big picture summary

Paul is saying:

The real battle Christians face is not against people, but against organized, intelligent, spiritual forces that work through systems, values, and structures opposed to God—and victory comes through God’s power, not human strength.

**Question 2.** Below are modern, concrete examples that many biblical scholars and theologians use to explain what Paul likely meant. Think of these as ways the same kinds of powers show up today.

a) “Rulers” — forces that shape societies at the deepest level

These are foundational powers that influence how entire cultures think and organize themselves.

Modern examples:

Ideologies that define human worth (e.g., people are valuable only if productive, wealthy, or useful), Nationalism elevated to ultimate loyalty, where the nation replaces moral accountability, racial or ethnic supremacy narratives that persist across generations. These aren’t just individual beliefs—they outlive individuals and shape institutions.

b) “Authorities” — legitimized systems that exercise power

These are powers that claim the right to rule, often appearing neutral or inevitable.

Modern examples:

Bureaucratic systems that perpetuate injustice while no single person feels responsible, legal or economic structures that favour the powerful and marginalize the vulnerable, corporate cultures that normalize exploitation while calling it “just business”. Paul would see these as powers that operate through human institutions, not identical to them.

c) “Powers of this dark world” — forces shaping the moral climate

These influence what a society considers normal, acceptable, or unavoidable.

Modern examples:

Consumerism that trains people to define identity through possessions, Disinformation ecosystems that distort truth until people no longer trust anything, Entertainment systems that normalize cruelty, dehumanization, or sexual exploitation, Darkness here is not ignorance alone, but distorted vision—seeing reality wrongly.

d) “Spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” — unseen influences

This phrase points to non-material realities that influence the visible world.

Modern examples (depending on interpretation):

Collective spiritual forces behind mass violence or hatred, where actions exceed rational explanation, addictive forces that enslave people beyond conscious choice, persistent cultural patterns of destruction that survive reforms and revolutions. Some Christians interpret this as literal personal spiritual beings; others see it as transpersonal spiritual realities. Paul likely allowed room for both.

Why Paul’s language still fits today

Paul’s genius is that his framework: avoids blaming individuals alone, avoids denying spiritual evil. He explains why evil persists even when people intend good.

Modern examples show how evil becomes embedded, systemic, and self-perpetuating.

How Paul says to resist these powers (still modern)

Paul’s answer wasn’t political domination or violence, but:

truth over propaganda, integrity over corruption. peace over retaliation, faith over despair, discernment over fear.

These undermine the powers at their roots, not just their symptoms.

In one sentence:

Paul’s “powers” are the unseen, organizing forces—spiritual, ideological, and systemic—that distort human life away from God, and they are just as active now as they were in the first century.

**Question 3.** “the flaming arrows of the evil one” can be understood in a pastoral, psychological, and worldview-shaping way, rather than as mystical projectiles or dramatic demonic attacks.

They symbolize things like: Doubt and fear, Temptation, Accusation and guilt, Lies about your worth or God’s character, Anxiety and discouragement

a) Start with the metaphor

In the ancient world, flaming arrows were used to:

create panic, set things on fire, force enemies out of cover

Paul is describing sudden, targeted attacks meant to destabilize, not ongoing background pressure.

b) What the “evil one” is doing

“the evil one” (a personal but not always visibly dramatic force) primarily attacks by distorting perception, not by spectacle.

The “arrows” are things that: come unexpectedly, lodge in the mind or imagination, spread damage if not extinguished quickly

c) Modern forms of the “flaming arrows”

Internal assaults rather than external disasters:

i Lies and half-truths

Thoughts like: “God has abandoned you.” “This doesn’t matter—compromise just this once.” “You are beyond forgiveness.”

These are arrows because they strike suddenly and burn because they keep spreading if believed.

ii Accusation and shame

Drawing on Revelation’s image of Satan as “the accuser,” these arrows often take the form of: obsessive guilt, corrosive self-condemnation, despair that paralyzes action

They are meant to silence vocation and erode confidence in God’s grace.

iii Fear and cynicism

fear that leads to withdrawal, cynicism that mocks hope, despair disguised as realism

These arrows undermine trust, which is exactly what faith is meant to protect.

#### **Question 4.** What faith is

Faith in action

Hebrews 11 “Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. 2 This is what the ancients were commended for. 3 By faith we understand that

the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible."

The shield of faith represents trust and confidence in God—who He is, what He has promised, and what He has done.

Why "faith" extinguishes them

When Paul says "take up the shield of faith", faith is not vague optimism or raw willpower.

The "shield of faith" comes from the Bible, specifically Ephesians 6:16. It's part of a metaphor where the Apostle Paul describes the "armour of God," using pieces of a Roman soldier's armour to explain spiritual truths.

Paul writes: "Take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one."

How faith works as a shield Faith protects you by: Blocking lies with truth ("God is faithful even when I don't feel it") Deflecting fear by trusting God's sovereignty, Extinguishing temptation by believing God's ways are better, Standing firm when circumstances are painful or confusing,

Why a shield? In Roman warfare, shields were: Large enough to protect the whole body, often used together with others for greater protection, designed to stop flaming arrows. That imagery suggests faith is not passive—it's something you actively take up, sometimes together with other believers.

The shield of faith is choosing to trust God—especially when life, emotions, or circumstances tell you not to.

Faith means:

trust in God's revealed faithfulness in Jesus

loyalty to God's purposes even when emotions falter

holding onto the larger story when smaller stories threaten to dominate

The shield works because it absorbs the impact before the lie reaches the heart.

We should not interpret flaming arrows as:

constant demon harassment

intrusive thoughts = demons

a reason for fear or paranoia

Instead, we should see them as real but ordinary, woven into daily Christian life.

The Big picture

the battle is about who controls the story you live in

the arrows aim at imagination, trust, and hope

faith keeps believers grounded in the victory already won through Christ

In short:

“the flaming arrows of the evil one” are sudden, destructive thoughts, accusations, fears, and lies that threaten to distort trust in God—and they are extinguished by steady, practiced faith rooted in the story of Jesus.